



## **Court Access**

### **Objective:**

Ensure fair and accessible justice systems

### **Strategy:**

Eliminate barriers to court access

### **Why is this strategy important?**

Accessible court systems depend on King County taking an active role in eliminating barriers to participation in court processes and to ensure that those processes are fair and well understood. The Family Law Facilitator Program and the Interpreter Program at District Court are just two examples of programs that support access to the Court.

The Family Law Facilitator Program at King County Superior Court provides information and referrals to family law litigants who are not represented by attorneys. Litigants may meet with a facilitator on a walk-in basis or by pre-scheduled appointment to get information about how to start family law actions, find forms, and learn about community resources. The program operates at both the King County Courthouse and the Norm Maleng Justice Center.

King County is a highly diverse community, with residents speaking many languages. Providing interpreter services to individuals accused of crimes is necessary to ensure access to justice and that defendants understand the charges and court process. King County Superior and District Courts have arranged for interpretation in over 140 languages. Interpreters for Superior Court and District Court assist litigants during attorney-client consultations and at arraignments, hearings, trials, and other court events. They also interpret for deaf jurors, at classes for parents and truant youth, appointments with court personnel and in many civil matters. Interpretation is available at all King County court locations.

### **How is our performance?**

Washington state law (RCW 2.42 and 2.43) requires that courts provide qualified interpretation services for participants in court proceedings for individuals with limited English proficiency, hearing impairment, and some other speech impairments. In King County, this can be a challenge given that residents speak many different languages and for about 23 percent of King County residents, English is not the first language they learned. While Spanish is the most common language requiring interpreter services, King County Courts have maintained a qualified cadre of interpreters to assist in many languages, even as they change year-to-year.

## **Moving forward**

In recent years, Superior Court has worked very hard to increase access to justice, particularly for litigants who do not have attorneys or who have limited proficiency in English. Many court forms and Family Law Facilitator instruction packets are available on the court's website, and quite a few have been translated into Spanish. Juvenile Court offers one orientation class -- Juvenile Justice 101 -- for parents new to the Juvenile Offender system and another -- Dependency 101 -- for parents new to the dependency system. Class materials have been translated into several languages. Family Court offers a Family Law Orientation class and a Non-Parental Custody class for unrepresented litigants. Two judicial committees -- the Pro Se Committee and the Courts and Community Committee -- focus on improving access to the court and expanding outreach and education to the community. A free court-based childcare center at the Norm Maleng Justice Center ensures that parents have a place to leave their children while they take care of court business. The court partners with the Public Law Library of King County, the King County Bar Association, and other organizations to promote onsite legal clinics, the Housing Justice Project, and other free and low-cost legal assistance options. And this represents only a sample of efforts being made to improve access to King County Superior Court.

## **Related Links**

[King County Superior Court](#)

[King County Family Court](#)

[King County District Court](#)

## **Technical Notes**

King County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator data provided by Superior Court.

King County District Court interpreter data collected through Interpreter Web, 2007 through 2011 by year, the top five languages and the number of cases served by an interpreter. The number of cases includes all interpreter assignments, such as for defendants, witnesses and translations.

King County language and demographic data collected by King County Performance, Strategy, and Budget from US Census and American Community Survey data.

## Charts and Maps

### Superior Court Family Law Information Center

#### 2011 Services provided by Family Law Facilitators and Intake Specialists

	Norm Maleng Justice Center	King County Courthouse	Total
Intake Specialist Questions	5,803	2,983	8,786
Meetings with Facilitators	2,494	1,768	4,262
Case Reviews at Court	1,304	1,666	2,970
Individuals Turned away because walk-in meetings are unavailable			51

Data Source: King County Superior Court

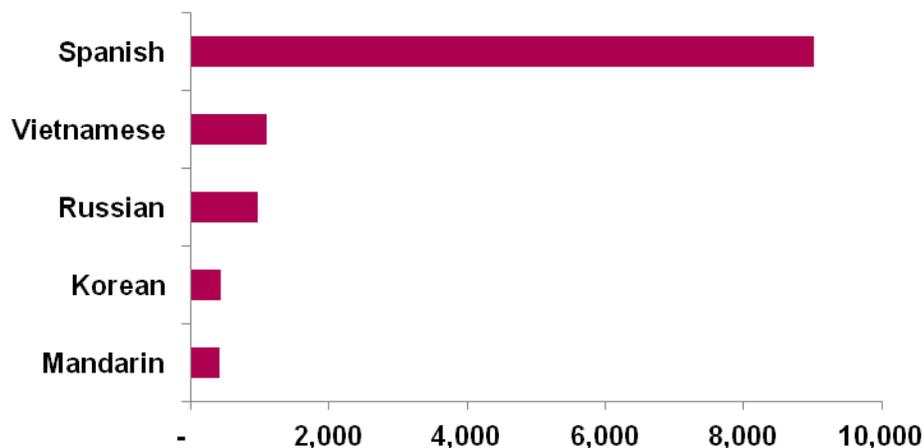
### District Court Interpreter Use

#### Top 5 Languages by Number of Cases per Year

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Spanish	12,330	10,367	9,768	9,596	9,015
Russian	1,227	982	956	1,051	967
Vietnamese	1,007	1,011	1,099	1,090	1,099
Korean	540	515	454	460	430
Mandarin		279	320	392	419
Somali	285				

Data Source: King County District Court

### District Court Interpreter Program Top 5 Languages in 2011 by number of cases



Data Source: King County District Court